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NEA/ELA
NEA/SA/EX/HR FOR CHERYL PARKER, PROGRAM SPECIALIST

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: AMGT APER SY
SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE GRANTED FOR ALEXANDER PASCAL

REF: SECSTATE 102303

¶1. (U) Embassy Damascus warmly welcomes and grants country clearance to Alexander Pascal, 2006 Summer Intern, for travel to Damascus from July 15 to August 20, 2006.

¶2. (U) POC for this visit is Elizabeth Lyne, Administrative Assistant, who can be reached at (work) (963) (11) 333-1342, Ext. 253 ; (cell) (963) (94) 230-106 (in-country 094-230-106); (home) (963) (11) 611-4282. Embassy fax number is (963) (11) 224-7938.

¶3. (U) VISA REQUIREMENT: Traveler(s) must have a valid Syrian visa prior to departure for Damascus. The Syrian government will not/not normally grant airport (or border) visas. Persons traveling on passports bearing an Israeli visa or entry/exit stamp, or persons born in the Gaza region or of Gazan descent, will be refused entry to Syria. American citizens are cautioned that the Syrian government rigidly enforces restrictions on prior travel to Israel. Travelers with Israeli stamps in their passports, Jordanian entry cachets, or cachets from Egypt or other countries that suggest prior travel to Israel may cause Syrian immigration authorities to refuse the traveler admission into Syria. Likewise, the absence of entry stamps from a country adjacent to Israel, which the traveler has just visited, will cause Syrian immigration officials to refuse admittance. American citizen travelers suspected of having traveled to Israel have been detained for questioning.

¶4. (U) SECURITY REQUIREMENTS: (a) If not included in request for country clearance, please provide level of security clearance via immediate cable. Post cannot allow access to the chancery compound or to the controlled access area without official notification of clearance level. Valid diplomatic passports or government identity cards do not guarantee that the bearer has an appropriate security clearance. (b) All visitors must receive a briefing from the Regional Security Office immediately upon arrival.

¶5. (U) TRANSPORTATION: Per reftel, Alexander Pascal will be traveling overland via service taxi from Amman to Damascus. Per Graaf/Pascal e-mail of 06/15/2006, Pascal will be met by an Embassy driver upon arrival to the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, and transferred to his residence.

¶6. (U) LODGING: Per Graaf/Pascal e-mail of 06/11/2006, GSO has approved use of an Embassy residence for Alexander Pascal for the entire duration of his stay in Damascus. Additional information regarding housing will be provided upon arrival.

¶7. (U) COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT: Long-distance telephone calls (for official business only) can be placed from the Embassy if the traveler provides a fund cite or has authorization from the appropriate agency/section head at post. The Internet can be accessed through a stand-alone PC

in the Embassy on a first-come, first-serve basis. There is no charge for this service. Alternatively, the Internet may be accessed from hotels in Damascus by placing a long-distance call to an ISP outside Syria. There are also several Internet "cafes" available.

¶18. (U) CURRENCY EXCHANGE: The Embassy Class B cashier provides accommodation exchange from dollars to Syrian pounds at the current rate for institutions (SP 50.80 to \$1) against cash, travelers checks, or, with the authorization of the financial management officer, personal checks. Reverse accommodation exchange is not authorized in accordance with Syrian government regulations. Alternatively, travelers can purchase pounds at branches of the Commercial Bank of Syria. It is illegal to exchange money except at authorized exchange points (i.e., the Embassy or branches of the Commercial Bank).

¶19. (U) PHOTOGRAPHY: Photography of individuals in uniform (including police), government buildings, and military installations is strictly forbidden.

¶10. (U) TRAVEL TO LEBANON: Any official travel to Lebanon from Syria by U.S. Government employees of any nationality is strictly subject to country clearance from Embassy Beirut. Unofficial travel to Lebanon of U.S. Government employees and dependents also requires advance clearance from both Embassy Beirut and the Department of State.

¶11. (U) DEPARTURE TAX: Syria charges a departure tax of SP200 (approximately \$4), payable in SP cash only. Travelers with diplomatic passports are exempt, but those with official passports are required to pay the tax.

¶12. (U) HEALTH: Health facilities in Damascus are not up to US or European standards and facilities outside Damascus are extremely limited. Only personnel covered under the State Department's medical program and with a valid medical clearance for Syria are eligible for medevac at USG cost. All other visitors are recommended to have medical evacuation insurance sufficient to cover evacuation by chartered air ambulance or ensure their agency will voucher the cost.

¶13. (U) THREAT ASSESSMENT: There are no specific threats against official or unofficial American travelers in Syria. Political developments and security in the Middle East sometimes change quickly. Violent mob attacks against U.S. mission facilities in Syria occurred in 1998 and 2000 in response to regional events. In February 2005, the former Prime Minister of Lebanon was assassinated in Beirut, prompting the U.S. to recall the Ambassador for consultations. She has not returned to post. U.S.-Syria bilateral relations remain problematic.

Government-sanctioned demonstrations have occasionally included expressions of anti-American or anti-Western sentiment. Violent mob attacks against three Scandinavian embassies took place in February 2006. Americans in Syria should vary their schedules. They should avoid large crowds and gatherings and should report suspicious incidents to the Regional Security Officer. They should also avoid electronic financial transactions and should not carry valuables or large amounts of cash in crowded shopping districts. Visitors should read and follow the guidance contained in the latest Public Announcements and State Department Travel Advisory for Syria.

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